

Foolish Things Remembered: Steve Fuger

Remember back in the day, when we were largely given free rein to learn from our foolishness?

Cowboys and Indians ranged across fences and backyards; rope swings over the creek; the lure of a rickety bridge; running the gauntlet of nesting magpies.

Remember billy carts? Such ingenuity. Ours incorporated a lidded box into which I, a *girl*, but conveniently small, would be folded. From a running start at the top of Beddoe Avenue (a precipitous gradient back then) boys leapt aboard as it gathered speed, as many as possible, clinging on as it attempted the right-hand bend into Clinton Street, never successfully, careering over, jettisoning its bodily load, and my appalled mother witnessing the lid flying off the box and her daughter rolling out.

That dolls' tea party? My little table and chairs laid with a tiny tea-set and marbles for pretend cakes, one of which a guest popped into his mouth, then toppled backwards off the verandah, the marble lodging in his windpipe. I can still see our neighbour jumping the fence, whisking him into the air by his ankles and slapping his back until the marble popped out.

The day my little brother packed my toy pram with dolls and, using it as a walker, left home. The neighbourhood was scoured, children formed a bicycle posse: "Don't worry Mrs Fuger, if he's dead we'll bring him back in my basket". He was found, marching down the centre of Hawthorn Road, heading for the Nepean Highway, Sydney bound.

The delight of my new cotton pinafore dress mum had made. Red and green tartan, frilled up the sides of the bib and over my shoulders, the most glorious thing ever. Early next morning before the world stirred, I confidently donned my new dress, opened the back door and toddled down the drive to the letterbox on the bluestone wall to show it off. But Clinton Street lay sleeping in the warmth of a breeze that wafted the full skirt of my beautiful dress, displaying to my sudden confusion that I'd forgotten my underpants. Those little legs couldn't carry me back into the house fast enough, how could I think I was old enough to dress myself?

Raw snails with bread and butter; a chaos of children on the tram bound for Saturday morning flics; Boxing Days riding on top of the horse-drawn dust cart.

Pre health-and-safety, of course.